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POSSIBLE CHANGES IN THE EAST GERMAN REGIME

The possibility of drastic changes in the East German government has been emphasized by the necessity to abandon German civil administration and assert Soviet military control as a result of the recent disturbances and by press criticisms of the regime for previous repressive measures. The extensive breakdown of civil administration during last week's rioting in Berlin and the Soviet Zone has revealed the inadequacy of the government at its various levels and the general unreliability of the German police forces. In view of these deficiencies, and the requirements of the Soviet conciliation program, there appears to be a strong need for transferring the authority currently vested in the Grotewohl government to another more palatable to the East German population and the West.

Since the beginning of the conciliation program there has been in East Germany a noticeable journalistic neglect of Ulbricht, heretofore the principal custodian of indigenous power in the German Democratic Republic. During the demonstrations popular antipathy toward Ulbricht and Minister President Grotewohl was obvious, and these two dignitaries refused to appear before the demonstrators. Unconfirmed reports have stated that the new Russian high commissioner, Semeonov, brought with him orders to remove Ulbricht, who in the past was the proponent of harshness and speed in the implementation of communization in East Germany. The change from Ulbricht's program to one of conciliation, and the discredit which the riots of the past week brought upon him, presage his downfall and replacement by someone more likely to command the respect of the populace and to be acceptable to the West Germans as a partner in the event of future talks on unity.

It has been suggested that Hermann Kastner of the Liberal Democratic Party, one-time deputy minister president who has been kept in the background for the past three years, will replace Grotewohl and head a new "non-communist" government. The association of his name with that of Otto Nuschke, CDU leader, in connection with alleged recent conversations with Semeonov gives rise to speculation that these men are to assume control of the East German government.

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There is no conclusive indication that the Soviets are prepared to abandon their socialization program in East Germany, but there is no doubt that they have introduced a period of leniency which will bring material advantages to the population and generally improve living conditions. It may be that the Soviets are taking cognizance of the essentially bourgeois character of the East German community and recognize that communization cannot be applied here as intensely as was possible in the Soviet Union. Certainly they know that a communist East Germany cannot be offered as a partner in German unification.

Now the Soviets are faced with the dilemma of establishing conditions in East Germany which appear to meet Western conditions for unity negotiations and yet maintain the military control that last week's disturbances have shown to be essential to the security of their position. A show of military strength would negate their conciliatory gestures, but relaxation of control would be a dangerous thing in view of the willingness of the East Germans to rebel if the opportunity presents itself.

Agitation for all-German talks would be aided by the prior removal of Ulbricht and Grotewohl from their offices. The appointment of the two bourgeois leaders, Kastner and Nuschke, to head a new government would probably do much to win West German sentiment for unity and yet leave dependable Soviet puppets in the GDR. There is no need to suppose that such a measure would be any more than a temporary maneuver to exert maximum influence on the West German voters before they go to the polls in early September. Having served its purpose, the bourgeois regime could be dropped and a communist regime reinstituted.

If, on the other hand, the Soviets feel that they must now revert to a policy of repression in East Germany, they must reckon with the failure of whatever they had hoped to achieve with their program of conciliation.

The third alternative, of course, is to maintain the status of the present regime, with some changes in its leadership, as one that is cognizant of its past mistakes and is now prepared to improve living and working conditions. The granting of several economic concessions immediately after the disturbances in Berlin suggests that this course is being followed. This measure would in the long run soften the rebellious attitudes currently prevalent in East Germany and would permit the maintenance of a communist-led regime. It would not, however, be as advantageous to the USSR in promoting the unity program as a "bourgeois" government led by such politicians as Kastner and Nuschke.

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